

Plantations are significant to African-American history and culture in the Virginia, Mid-Ohio Valley because with only small towns such as Guyandotte on the western frontier, most African-Americans lived on plantations such as Greenbottom. The slaves on these plantations often were only separated from freedom by the Ohio River.

Dr. Marilyn Davis-DeEulis discovered in her research that Wilson C. Nicholas and William H. Cabell both operated overseer plantations at Greenbottom during their ownership of the property (1811-24). In 1820, fifty-three of the three hundred and ninety two slaves in Cabell County worked on the Greenbottom Plantation (Cabell Co. 1820). When Nicholas sold the plantation to Cabell the following slaves were named in the deed: Ben, Moses (a runaway), Jack, Kit, Davey, Charles, Bob, John, Joe, Jim, Armstead, Cimon, Peter, Washington, Phillip, Dolly, Daphney, Isabell, Milly, Nelson (Milly's child), Maria (Milly's child), Nathan (Milly's child), Solomon (Isabel's child), and Winney (Isabel's child) (Cabell/Nicholas Deed Book 3/360).

In Rockbridge County, Virginia, Capt. Jenkins reported owning, in 1810, 17 slaves, and in 1820, 19 slaves (one free male African-American, 14-26 years old lived in his household) (Rockbridge Co. 1810 & 20). After purchasing the Greenbottom Plantation and several of its slaves, Capt. Jenkins reported he owned 33 slaves in 1830; by 1840, 37 slaves; in 1850, 55 slaves (US Census, 1830 & 40; Slave Schedules 1850). Capt. Jenkins died in 1859, and his slaves went to his heirs. The Jenkins slaves do not appear in the Cabell County 1860 Slave Schedules. However, in the 1860 Personal Property Tax Records, that only report male slaves over 12 years old, the three sons who inherited Capt. Jenkins' slaves owned 36 male slaves over 12 years old compared to 8 of 22 males over the age of 12 in 1850. (Cabell Co. 1860) This would indicate that the number of African-American slaves on the plantation had increased and may have been over 80.

Throughout Capt. Jenkins ownership, more female than male slaves worked on the plantation. More than likely, the reason for more female and young male slaves than male slaves was because female slaves and males under 12 years were not taxed. For example, the population of slaves in 1850 included 33 females and 22 males with a total of 55 (two more of Th. Jenkins). Over half the slaves were under 10 years old (14 of the 22 males) with the second largest age group, 10-24 years (in 1840 less slaves but still more females than males and most under 24).

As on most plantations, slaves provided the labor and craftsmanship to build the plantation buildings. They also provided the labor in the plantation fields and were servants in the main house. At Greenbottom the slaves made brick and hewed logs for the building of Capt. Jenkins' brick plantation house in the 1830s.

Not all of Greenbottom's slaves were content to stay on the plantation. Capt. Jenkins shared, like other plantation owners in the Ohio Valley, a problem with escaping slaves. Abolitionists, white and African-American, often operated safe houses or Underground Railroad stations near the free banks of the Ohio River tempting African-Americans in servitude to cross the river to possible freedom. Capt. Jenkins, according to the Cabell County Records, was sued by James Shelton, a local slave catcher and owner of a plantation at the end of West Pea Ridge, in 1827 for not paying him enough for the return of one slave. Again in 1848, Capt. Jenkins had a case involving slave stealing in front of the court. (Extracts from the Records of County Court) Another example, in 1857, Charles Morris went to court to have four of his slaves returned from Lawrence County, Ohio (Extracts from the Records of County Court). Many accounts of escaping slaves are known. One account of slaves escaping across the river was told by Mrs. Emily Magee Prichard in 1929. She remembers her family hiding one runaway in their home in Proctorville, Ohio, for